THE BREWSTER APARTMENTS

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

Originally Submitted to the
Commission on Chicago Historical
and Architectural Landmarks
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The BREWSTER APARTMENTS

2800 North Pine Grove Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Architect: Enoch Hill Turnock
Date completed: 1893

Dominating the northwest corner of Diversey Parkway and Pine Grove Avenue, the Brewster Apartments represents an excellent early application of the principles of metal-frame construction to the design of a large residential building. The Brewster also represents an efficient solution to one of the major problems faced by architects at the end of the nineteenth century: providing adequate light and air to the taller buildings made possible by skeleton construction. The apartments in the Brewster surround an atrium, which not only increases light and ventilation but also provides a dramatic interior space. Architectural historian Carl Condit has called this "one of the most remarkable systems of interior planning in the building art of his [Turnock's] time."

The Brewster is the only large-scale building designed by architect Enoch Hill Turnock and is considered his major contribution to the architectural heritage of Chicago. Originally called the Lincoln Park Palace, the Brewster was commissioned by B. Edwards, publisher of *American Contractor* magazine, who wanted a building of small, elegant apartments.

Enoch Hill Turnock and the Development of the Multi-Story Residential Building

Enoch Hill Turnock was born in London, England, on February 27, 1857. His family came to this country when he was a youngster and he spent his childhood in Elkhart, Indiana. He moved to Chicago around 1884 and obtained a job as draftsman for William LeBaron Jenney, whose office had produced such important Chicago architects as Louis Sullivan, Daniel Hudson Burnham, William Holabird, and Martin Roche. In 1890, Turnock

opened his own architectural practice and during the next eight years the "Building News" column of *Inland Architect* magazine announced forty-two commissions awarded to Turnock. Many of these were for residences and churches in the western suburbs of Chicago. His early domestic designs were usually Queen Anne, Shingle Style, or Romanesque revival.

While working for Jenney, Turnock had learned the principles of metal-frame construction. Jenney was a pioneer in the development of this technique, whereby the weight of a building is borne not by its exterior walls but rests instead on an internal framework of iron or steel. One of the first structures supported almost entirely by its metal frame was Jenney's Home Insurance Building, which was built in 1885 at the northeast corner of LaSalle and Adams streets in Chicago (demolished 1931). This innovation made it possible to build to greater heights, a distinct advantage at a time when cities were growing and land costs were rising. Architects working in Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century developed a new aesthetic based upon the technology of the skeleton frame and created a distinct style that has come to be called the Chicago school of architecture. Although the Chicago school is associated primarily with downtown office buildings, the new technology was applied to hotels and apartment buildings as well.

Because America's cities had grown so rapidly during the nineteenth century, there was a definite need for large multi-unit residential buildings. The skeleton frame was ideally suited to this type of structure, and Chicago architects began to create housing of a larger scale than had previously been known. In *Space, Time and Architecture*, his important history of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architecture, Sigfried Giedion wrote:

> The interior organization and the architectonic details of some of these buildings are astonishingly daring and advanced. Solutions which today are still in process of being formulated appeared in outline in these flats and hotels of a generation back—just as contemporary business and civic centers were anticipated by the Chicago office blocks.

Many of these early hotels and apartment buildings have been demolished, including: the Great Northern Hotel by Burnham and Root, which was completed in 1892 and demolished in 1940; the Hyde Park Hotel by Theodore Starrett, completed in 1888 and 1891 and demolished in 1963; the Leander McCormick Apartments by Clinton J. Warren, completed in 1890 and demolished in 1929; and the Plaza Hotel, also by Warren, completed in 1892 and demolished in 1968. The Brewster is one of a small number of these buildings that remain.

Although technological advances in the field of skeleton construction made it possible for architects to design taller buildings, developments in artificial lighting and forced air ventilation did not keep pace. Architects faced the problem of how to insure adequate light and air in these larger structures. An early solution was the courtyard building; the U-shaped plan admitted maximum light and sufficient ventilation and was consequently

employed extensively in hotel and apartment construction. The Commodore and Greenbriar apartments at the northeast and southeast corners, respectively, of Broadway and Surf Street, built around the same time as the Brewster just a few blocks away, are examples of the tall courtyard apartment building.

The four-sided, hollow-core building was another alternative. Burnham and Root's 1886 Rookery Building (designated a Chicago Landmark on July 5, 1972) is a hollow-core structure with a lobby at the bottom of its interior light court; this lobby receives natural light through the skylight that forms its roof. If the interior light court of a hollow-core building is topped at its full height by a skylight, a true atrium results. The Chamber of Commerce Building by Edward Baumann and Harris Huehl (built in 1890 at the southeast corner of LaSalle and Washington streets and demolished in 1928) was a true atrium building; its interior light court extended the full height of the building where it was topped by a skylight. This arrangement of space provided cross ventilation and natural light for the offices of the building. Turnock was most likely familiar with this building when he received the commission for the Brewster in 1892.

The Brewster Apartments

The Brewster is an eight-story structure supported by a steel frame that is faced with four-inch-thick, rough-faced blocks of Jaspar stone. It extends approximately 60 feet along Diversey Parkway and nearly 150 feet along Pine Grove Avenue. Rounded oriels mark the northeast and southeast corners above the first floor, three pairs of angled oriels project from the Pine Grove facade, and a single pair projects from the Diversey facade. An elaborately ornamented cornice tops the building and above this the metal frame of the skylight is barely visible. The main entrance was originally on Diversey Parkway; today this entry serves the shops located on the lower floors of the south end of the building. The Pine Grove entry is today the main entrance, although it was originally designed as the "ladies' entrance," and had inside a small reception room for guests. The Pine Grove entrance is flanked at each side by a band of three windows framed by four polished Jaspar stone colonnettes.

While the Brewster's projecting windows were a typical feature of late nineteenth-century Chicago apartment buildings and hotels, its facade of massive stone blocks was unusual. Turnock may have been influenced in his use of heavy, rough-faced stone by the work of Henry Hobson Richardson, one of America's premier architects during the mid-nineteenth century, who, as Carl Condit points out: "was very fond of the romantic and sensuous effect produced by this rich and heavy texture."

The ornament of the cornice is reminiscent of the ornament being produced around the same time by Louis Sullivan. The lower portion of the cornice consists of a band of repeating foliate forms and linear patterns similar to Sullivan's work. Above this appears a series of sculpted lion's heads separated by ornamented brackets, the whole composition providing an emphatic termination to the building. Sullivan's work may also have influ-

enced the design of the column capitals and molding in the lobby which consists of a lush pattern of intertwined tendrils and oak leaves.

According to Carl Condit, "no exterior detail of the Brewster matches the originality and daring that Turnock displayed in the interior construction." The large rectangular atrium opens the interior of the building; such a large interior open space was unusual in residential buildings of the time. Access to the apartment floors is provided by an open-cage elevator and the cast-iron staircase that surrounds it on three sides. Cast-iron bridges cross the long dimension of the space and branch at right angles to lead to the entrances of the individual apartments. These bridges are paved with glass blocks, which allows a maximum amount of natural light to filter down from the skylight nine stories above the lobby floor. The bridge railings are of cast-iron belting in a simple woven latticework pattern. Each panel of railing has at its center a decorative wreath and is supported by a decorative but functional scroll of iron belt. The entire complex has been described by Condit as "a repetitive pattern of delicate iron screens and bands set off in black against the soft diffused light falling through the glass decks of the bridges. The whole expression is in extreme contrast to the heavy masonry of the external walls."

The Brewster has been remodeled at least twice; in both of these cases the architectural integrity of the building was maintained. In 1972, an ambitious rehabilitation project was undertaken. The exterior was cleaned and the rich pink color of the Jaspar stone was revealed beneath the gray accumulation of dirt. The interior rehabilitation was completed under the direction of architect Meiki Hayano. Today the Brewster is in excellent condition and stands as an excellent example of the early application of skeleton construction to a tall residential building. It is also an example of superior interior planning and demonstrates the design idioms of the late nineteenth century.

OPPOSITE:

The projecting windows of the Brewster derive directly from the tradition of late nineteenth-century Chicago hotels and apartment buildings, while the massive stone facade may have been influenced by the work of H. H. Richardson who employed rough-faced stone for its romantic quality.

(Bob Thall, photographer)

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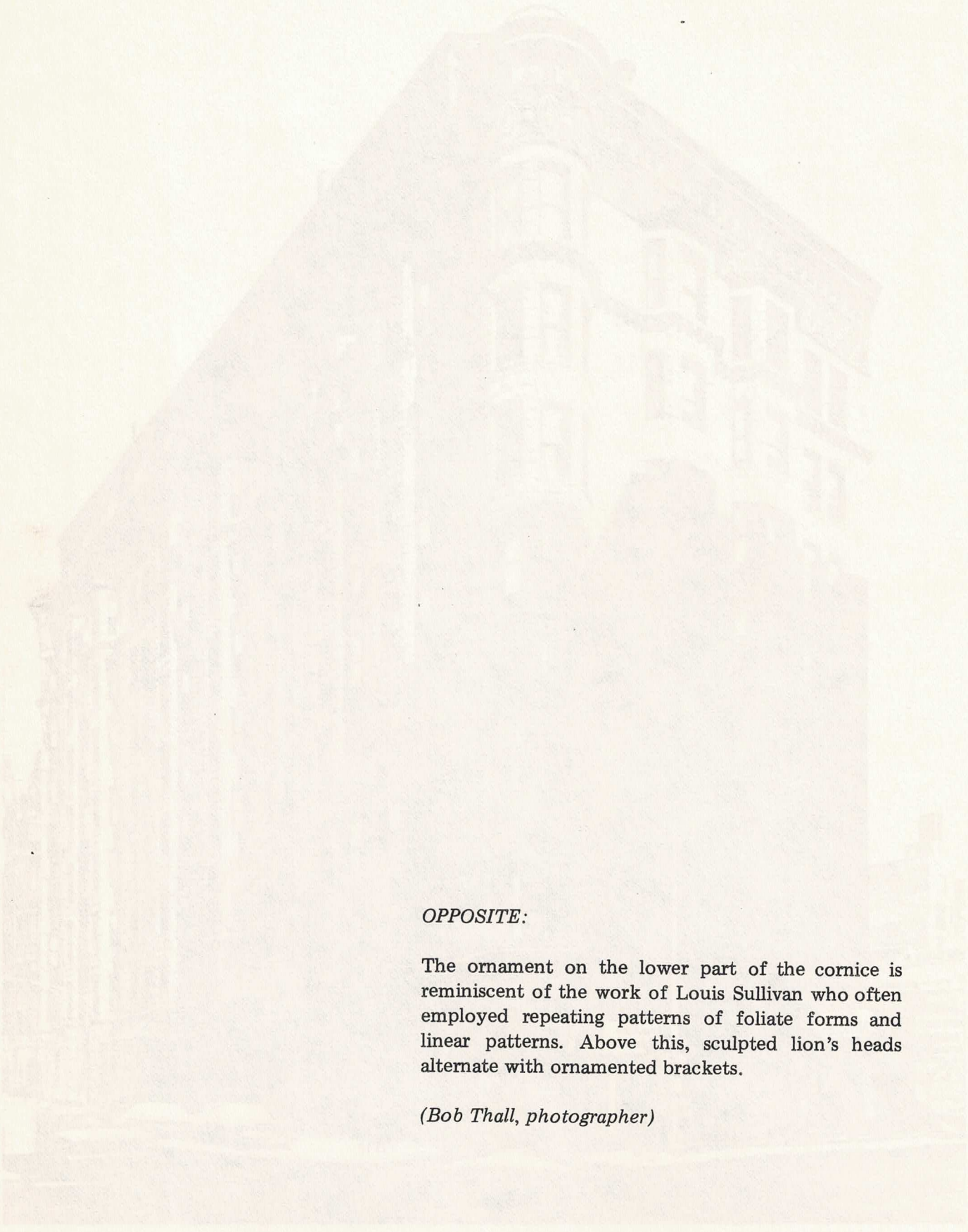
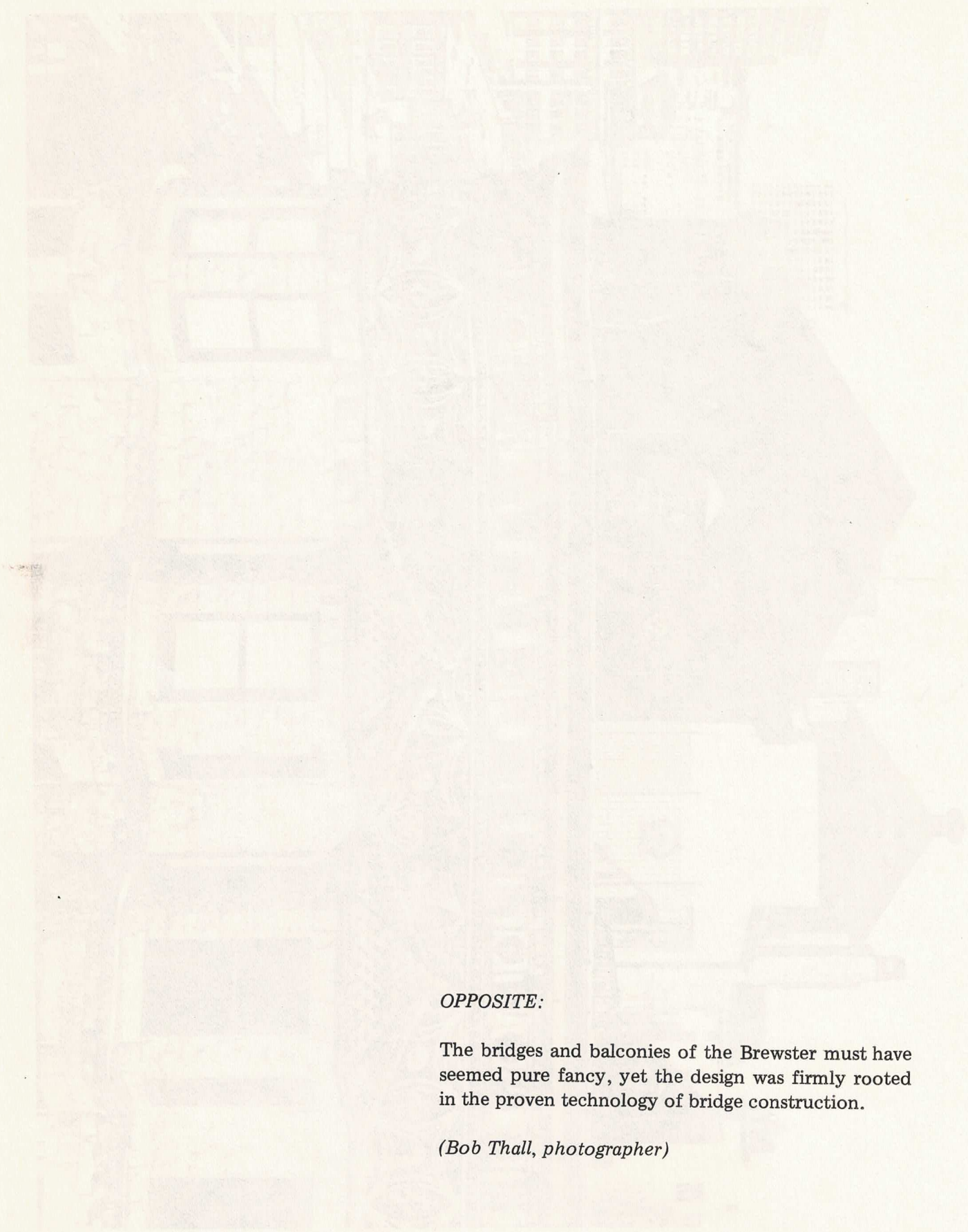


OPPOSITE:

The ornament on the lower part of the cornice is reminiscent of the work of Louis Sullivan who often employed repeating patterns of foliate forms and linear patterns. Above this, sculpted lion's heads alternate with ornamented brackets.

(Bob Thall, photographer)



OPPOSITE:

The bridges and balconies of the Brewster must have seemed pure fancy, yet the design was firmly rooted in the proven technology of bridge construction.

(Bob Thall, photographer)

The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to the designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from the qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information has been prepared by the Commission staff and was submitted to the Commission when it initiated consideration of the historical and architectural qualities of this potential landmark.

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